

Before French colonialists imposed national boundaries to distinguish Laos from Vietnam... the two nations shared the exact same land. But the kings of Laos and Vietnam had a longstanding agreement for knowing which king received taxes from which people... who lived side by side... in this combined territory... ... Those who ate short-grain rice... built their houses on stilts... and decorated them with Indian-style serpents... gave their taxes to the King of Laos. ... On the other hand... those who ate long-grain rice... built their houses on the ground... and decorated them with Chinese-style dragons... were considered Vietnamese... and paid its king.

The location of a person's home... was not what determined his or her citizenship. ... Instead... each person belonged to the kingdom whose cultural values he or she exhibited.

The same is true... when it comes to being a citizen of God's Kingdom. ... There is a way of recognizing people who are part of God's kingdom... even though we live side-by side with non-citizens. ... Citizens of the Kingdom of God live according to His kingdom's standards and values.

In our study through the Gospel of Matthew... Jesus began His ministry where John the Baptist left off – proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is at hand. ... Matthew then... immediately takes us to what we call today “The Sermon on the Mount”... The reason for this... is because Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is a description of God’s Kingdom standards and values. ... Here is what it looks like. Here is what the new heart that God places in every citizen of it... produces in the life of its citizens.

In the section of Christ’s sermon that we will study today... we will see a definite contrast between a normal person... and a citizen of God’s

Kingdom. ... If you are a citizen of God's Kingdom these are the qualities that God will be at work... in your life... to accomplish. He will be at work inside of you... *distinguishing* you from normal living.

Any person who is perfectly content to live their life... without much (if any) distinction... (living very much like a **non**-citizen of God's Kingdom)... I think it is safe to say... is not yet a part of God's kingdom. God has not given you a new heart that desires a righteousness that is greater than the Pharisees.

Last week we ended on a description of God's Kingdom people that spoke of that.

### **Matthew 5:20**

Wow! That is a very sobering statement! I am sure when Christ first said it... He shocked a lot of His listeners. ... And we too should be jarred by it. *What do you mean... Jesus...? Pharisees had meticulous routines and showed painstaking devotion. How do I know that I have exceeded them... or that I have been given this new heart...?*

Should there have been an instant obedience... to every command in Scripture... overnight? ... Of course not. ... But make no mistake about this... (know this for sure!): there will be some evidence. There will be some change in our life if we have been born again... and a continuous progression toward these qualities. And this is... in some measure... what the remainder of Jesus' sermon is about.

The Pharisees had created all kinds of ingenious ways of working around the intentions of God's Word. For example... they found ways to harbor bitterness and hatred toward their neighbor... while remaining innocent in

their own eyes... because they did not murder. ... They may have lusted after their neighbor's wives... but so long as they didn't actually commit the physical act of adultery... they felt themselves to be holy... technically speaking. ... In general... they felt justified in blurring the edges of the truth. They would swear by Jerusalem... or their own head... and then back out on their promise... because they did not swear by God Himself. ... Because it was not the strongest oath... in their thinking... they could somehow still be people of integrity. ...

The Pharisees said that righteousness consisted of performing certain actions. The Pharisees had a list of external actions that were sinful, but Jesus explained that sin came from the attitudes of the heart. Anger is murder in the heart; lust is adultery in the heart.

So here is what Jesus will be showing us through His sermon. The Pharisees merely had an external righteousness. It was deeds and actions alone... which is not the kind of righteousness that is characterized by God's Kingdom people.

Self-justification and good appearances are not what characterizes God's Kingdom people. The new heart that God gives to its members ushers forth new attitudes. ... The question we need to ask is this: "Do we see those new attitudes in our lives?" ... Are striving after what our final verse for today says... "Be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect..." ... You see... someone who is not a citizen of God's Kingdom... who does not have a new heart... will hear these descriptions and think... "*Pfff... that is not me... nor will it ever be... and I don't really care...*" ... But the new heart that God gives to His Kingdom people ushers forth new attitudes.

## Matthew 5:21-22

The Lord immediately restored the commandment to its original intent. He traced murder to its source or motive: anger. The anger that produces murder, He pointed out, is as great a sin as murder itself. ... Moses said, "You must not murder" (Exodus 20:13); Jesus taught that we should not even become angry enough to murder, for then we have already committed murder in our heart.

The Pharisees read this law and... not having literally murdered anyone... felt that they had obeyed it. ... Killing is a terrible sin... but anger is a great sin too... Why? What is so bad about it...? ... It is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control... leading to violence... emotional hurt... increased mental stress... and spiritual damage. ... Anger keeps us from developing a spirit pleasing to God.

Have you ever been proud that you didn't strike out and say what was really on your mind? ... Self-control is good... but Christ wants us to practice thought-control as well.

There is a holy anger against sin...

### **Ephesians 4:26 (ESV)**

*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,*

...But but Jesus talked about an unholy anger against people. The word He used in Matthew 5:22... means "a settled anger, malice that is nursed inwardly." Christ adjusted the attitude about murder to include murder in the temper and murder in the tongue. A bad temper and a bad tongue lead to

murder. And Christ says that a bad temper and a bad tongue will also bring judgment.

A citizen of the Kingdom of God must get the matter settled, and we must do it quickly. The longer we wait... the worse the bondage becomes! ... We put ourselves into a terrible prison when we refuse to be reconciled.

### **Matthew 5:23-26**

Notice the priority of reconciliation. ... and also the promptness of reconciliation. ... **First**, the *priority of reconciliation*. "*Leave your gift before the altar and go... first be reconciled to your brother.*" ... This reconciliation is so important it is to be done before worship. ... **Second**... the *promptness of reconciliation*. (Verse 25) "*Come to terms quickly with your accuser...*" Do not waste time or be slack about getting right with your adversary. ... The message here is that the hot temper and harmful tongue need to be dealt with quickly before they stir up further troubles.

Jesus went on to mention a practical example of a first century trouble that might occur if anger is not dealt with quickly. In Jesus' day, someone who couldn't pay a debt was thrown into prison until the debt was paid. Unless someone came to pay the debt for the prisoner, he or she would probably die there. It is practical advice to resolve our differences with our enemies before their anger causes more trouble.

You may not get into a disagreement that takes you to court, but even small conflicts mend more easily if you try to make peace right away. In a broader sense, these verses advise us to get things right with our brothers and sisters before we have to stand before God.

## Matthew 5:27-30

Sexual impurity begins in the desires of the heart. ... The "look" that Jesus mentioned was not a casual glance, but a constant stare *with the purpose of lusting*. The word in greek is "blepo" and it means "to look, to keep on looking, to observe closely and with desire."

The first involuntary glance is not the culprit. It is possible for a man to glance at a beautiful woman and know that she is beautiful, but not lust after her. The man Jesus described... looked at the woman *for the purpose of feeding his inner sensual appetites...* as a substitute for the act. It was not accidental - it was planned.

It is the second glance—the deliberate act that feeds the impulse and turns the glance into a lustful look—that Jesus said puts us in peril. There would be no adultery, no fornication, without that lustful look.

The Old Testament law said that it is wrong for a person to have sex with someone other than his or her spouse (Exodus 20:14). But Jesus said that the desire to have sex with someone other than your spouse is mental adultery and thus sin. Jesus emphasized that if the act is wrong, then so is the intention. To be faithful to your spouse with your body but not your mind is to break the trust so vital to a strong marriage. Jesus is condemning not natural interest in the opposite sex or even healthy sexual desire but the deliberate and repeated filling of one's mind with fantasies that would be evil if acted out.

Lust is polar opposite to true love. ... It dehumanizes another person into an object of passion... leading us to act as if the other was our visual or

emotional prostitute... for our use. ... Fueled by selfish passion... adultery violates the sanctity of another person's being and relationships. ... Dealing with people as human beings like ourselves... rather than objects of our passion... is an important defense against lust.

Love... by contrast... seeks what is best for a person... including strengthening their marriage. ... But isn't it interesting that adultery usually involves considerable rationalization... justifying one's behavior as "necessary" or "loving." ...However - nothing could be further from the truth.

When Jesus said to get rid of your hand or your eye... He was speaking *figuratively*. He did not ask us to physically remove our literal right eye or right hand. ... How do I know that? Two reasons: the first is the context. The context is matters of the heart. ... Jesus is giving the characteristics of righteousness in the Kingdom of God and He has been contrasting it with the righteousness of the Pharisees. The righteousness of the Pharisees was an EXTERNAL righteousness. Jesus is making the point that God's Kingdom righteousness is an INTERNAL righteousness. ... This is part of that same message. Jesus is not telling us to fix our internal lust problem with an *external* righteous act. That would not exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.

Second... (stop and think!) Can a person without a right eye still lust...? Yes! (He still has his left eye that is very capable of lust.) Even if he gouged out *both* eyes... as a blind person... he can still lust. No problem has been solved. ... If the solution to lust and adultery is found in the destruction of the offending member of the body... then the only practical action that a man could take... would be to end his life.

We must look for another explanation of what Christ was saying.

We sometimes tolerate sins in our life that, left unchecked, could eventually destroy us. It is better to experience the pain of removal (getting rid of a bad habit or something we treasure, for instance) than to allow the sin to bring judgment and condemnation. Examine your life for anything that causes you to sin, and take every necessary action to remove it.

Jesus used deliberate overstatement to emphasize the importance of acting decisively against this sin. Pay the painful cost of diminishing your great reputation... by going to a Christian friend and admitting your struggle... and ask them to hold you accountable and to keep you in constant prayer. Put software on your computer that will prevent you from looking at internet pornography. ... Call the cable company and stop your subscription to channels where you are prone to stumble. ... Discover different forms of entertainment... instead of relying so heavily on the godless Hollywood industry. Be honest! Is it causing you to stumble...? Cut it off!

### **Matthew 5:31-32**

The background of the Lord's teaching about marriage was the prevalent permissiveness and immorality of the Jewish culture in which He lived—a world much like the one in which we live.

They had made divorce a matter of little more inconvenience... than the issuing of a certificate. The sacred marriage vow had become a light commitment of little conviction.



In this verse, however, Jesus reiterates that marriage was intended by God to be a permanent commitment with the only permissible consideration for divorce being the breach of that intimate trust... through the act of adultery.

Jesus declared that only one sin dissolves marriage in the sight of God: fornication or moral unchastity. Moses conceded to divorce on such grounds, but did not command it.

Divorce is as hurtful and destructive today as in Jesus' day. God intends marriage to be a lifetime commitment. When entering into marriage, God's Kingdom people should never consider divorce an option for solving problems... or a way out of a relationship that seems uninteresting... loveless... or dead.

The Lord's teaching on divorce in the sermon on the mount agrees with His later definitive statement on divorce in Matthew 19:3-12. In both passages divorce is allowed on the ground of marital unfaithfulness. Such a divorce dissolves the marriage completely and leaves the innocent party free to remarry. ... Divorce on other grounds leaves neither party free to remarry.

If there has been no sexual infidelity... there can be no real divorce. If there has been no real divorce... there can be no remarriage... and any additional sexual unions are adulterous. That is why Jesus adds in verse 32... the message that a false divorce encourages adultery... it provides opportunity for adultery... it entices it.

### **Matthew 5:33-37**

This is not the sin of "cursing," but the sin of using oaths to affirm that what is said is true. The Pharisees used all kinds of tricks *to* sidestep the truth, and oaths were among them. In Jesus' day, the rabbis had devised schemes by which to circumvent the law. The Pharisees were notorious for their oaths, which were made on the least provocation, yet they made allowances for mental reservations within their oaths. If they wanted to be relieved of oaths they had made by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, or by their own heads, they could argue that since God himself had not been involved, their oaths were not binding.

Jesus taught that our conversation should be so honest, and our character so true, that we would not need "crutches" to get people to believe us. Words depend on character, and oaths cannot compensate for a poor character. ... When the follower of the Lord makes a statement, his or her word should be sufficient, his or her integrity unquestioned, and the fulfillment of the promise certain. A "yes" should always mean "yes." A "no" should always mean "no."

### **Matthew 5:38-39**

*"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth..."* God's purpose behind this law was an expression of mercy. The law was given to judges and said, in effect, "Make the punishment fit the crime." The original law was a fair one; it kept people from forcing the offender to pay a greater price than the offense deserved. These laws were given to *limit* vengeance and help the court administer punishment that was neither too strict nor too lenient. It also prevented people from taking personal revenge.

Some people, however, were using this phrase to justify their vendettas against others. And people to this very day... *still* try to excuse their acts of revenge... by saying... "I was just doing to him what he did to me."

Jesus replaced this wrongful interpretation of this law... with a Kingdom attitude: be willing to suffer loss yourself rather than cause another to suffer.

The subject here is retaliation. Jesus is making the contrast between retaliation and meekness, for meekness is just the opposite of retaliation.

When we are wronged, often our first reaction is to get even. Instead, Jesus said we should do *good* to those who wrong us! Our desire should not be to keep score but to love and forgive. This is not natural—it is supernatural. Only a new kingdom heart can give us the strength to love as God does. ... When we seek retaliation against those who have wronged us, we are trying to restore our pride rather than demonstrate the love of the Father within us.

Christ gives four illustrations for the application of what He is teaching here. **First**, the cheek application.

### **Matthew 5:39b**

This is more of a principle than an illustration. (LISTEN CAREFULLY)

Turning the cheek simply is the opposite of retaliation. Please understand that this does not teach... that a woman is not to fight off a man who is trying to rape her. ... Fighting off a rapist is not retaliation... but justified self-preservation. ... We are not prohibited by this... from defending our family and property. ... this is a prohibition against retaliation.

**Second**, the cloak application.

#### **Matthew 5:40**

This is retaliation against justice. People are prone to retaliate even when justice is exercised against them for their wrong. As an example, when a car dealer is going to repossess a car because payments have not been made, the car owner often damages the car in retaliation. If he followed Christ's exhortation, he would wash and wax and clean the car before the dealer came to repossess it. That is the teaching of this "cloak" application.

**Third**, the compelling application.

#### **Matthew 5:41**

In the culture of that day, a soldier could compel a civilian to carry his equipment. The compelling was limited to a certain distance. The non-retaliation exhortation here said to be extra kind and carry the equipment farther than commanded.

This application attacks the idea of doing only the mere minimum when you are forced to do some irksome duty. Only doing the minimum is a subtle way of retaliation... and Christ says that is wrong.

**Fourth**, the charity application.

#### **Matthew 5:42**

Few applications are more misapplied than this one. The application does not mean we are to give anything anyone wants from us. It does not mean

giving money to anyone who asks it (a man may be asking for money to gamble or buy booze). In the context of this application it means not to withhold good from someone who has done you evil. If someone did you evil a month ago and they come to you for help... your refusal would be a form of retaliation. "*I won't help you... because you wouldn't help me... or You did harm to me...*" It is this retaliation that is forbidden by the application.

### **Matthew 5:43-47**

The Old Testament Law ***did*** say "You shall love your neighbor..." but nowhere in the Old Testament did God add "*and hate your enemy...*" This was added later by the rabbis... and they felt very justified by having this attitude. ... But Jesus says that the Kingdom attitude is to be different.

God loved ***us***... when we were His enemies... and a new kingdom heart has the same love that God has... a love that even extends to our enemies.

Jesus gave several reasons why we need this characteristic. (1) This love is a mark of maturity, proving that we are *sons* of the Father, and not just little children. (2) It is Godlike. The Father shares His good things with those who oppose Him. Matthew 5:45 suggests that our love "creates a climate" of blessings that makes it easy to win our enemies and make them our friends. Love is like the sunshine and rain that the Father sends so graciously. (3) It is a testimony to others. "*What more are you doing than others...?*" is a good question. ... God expects us to live on a much higher plane than the people who are not citizens of His kingdom... who return good for good... and evil for evil. ... As Christians... we must return good for evil as distinctive evidence of a new heart.

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We could very easily become discouraged by a casual reading of Matthew chapter five. If hate is equal to murder in the eyes of a holy God... who among us has not committed murder? ... If lust is equal to adultery according to the standard of our Christ... who among us has not committed adultery? ... If it is necessary for us to swear an oath in order to validate our truthfulness in our daily conversations... who among us is not a liar? Who among us, indeed... is willing to wait for God to defend our integrity when we have been wronged? ... Are we never bristling to strike back... verbally or physically... to defend our rights and honor? ... If these are the standards set forth by Jesus himself for the people of his kingdom... Shouldn't we all just throw in the towel now...? ... What hope is there...? The answer is this... by having the correct aim. Fix your eyes on the right standard...

### **Matthew 5:48**

What is the bottom line? ... It is this standard "*You therefore must be perfect... as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*" ... "Well thanks a lot Pastor... that doesn't help!!! It only makes matters worse... because perfection is impossible to achieve..." ... Yes... I realize that... but it must be our goal. ... In other words, our goal is to be like Jesus. ... The apostle Paul wrote...

### **Philippians 3:12 (ESV)**

*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

In this life we cannot be flawless... but we can aspire to be as much like Christ as possible. ... Our tendency to sin must never deter us from striving to be more like Christ. ... We must be brought back to the basic truth that Christ calls every person of His Kingdom to excel... to rise above mediocrity... and to mature in every area... becoming more and more like Him.

And we must take special notice that **God** is the standard of our comparison. God's kingdom people are not to look around at others... and think... *"Well... I must be doing pretty good... because I am a whole lot better at loving my enemies than Bill Smith over there..."* *"Deacon Jones and his wife watch sexually explicit movies on Netflix in their home... What I'm watching isn't as bad. I'm doing OK..."* ... .. And as long as God remains the standard... none of us will have any room to boast... *"Look how far **I've** come... Look at my spiritual success...!"* " because we will always have a very long way to go!

God did not make any one of us a part of His kingdom... just to save us from the fires of Hell. "Now that you're saved... just sit back and wait for Heaven..." No! We are to allow the Spirit of God to work within us... to make us more Christlike. And maybe God has shown you something today... that He wants you to stop being complacent about.

Make it a matter of prayer and maybe involve a brother or sister in Christ who will help and encourage you.